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ABSTRACT

Perspectives concerning the need for a more caring, serving society and for raising the serving capacity of institutions in society are considered. It is suggested that in the university there should be a more determined effort to develop the servant leadership potential that exists among students. Although students with athletic potential find elaborate coaching resources available, nothing explicit is done in the crucial undergraduate years to develop leadership potential. This situation might be addressed by the rare professor who independently takes an interest in this aspect of student growth. Additionally, a college president could personally offer to lead a noncredit seminar for elected student leaders. The agenda of the seminar might be discussions with invited resource people and sharing between the president and the student leaders on matters of mutual concern in their current leadership roles. Young people can be helped to accept the world and to believe that they can learn to live productively in it as it is, to make a small part of the world a little better. The potential role of seminaries and foundations in encouraging servant leaders and bringing together communities of seekers is noted. Important to receiving, communicating, and responding to liberating visions are immersion in the experiences the world offers, acceptance of people involved in these experiences and learning what motivates them, and being open to receive and act upon what inspiration offers. (SW)

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SERVANT

Retrospect & Prospect

I believe that caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is what makes a good society. Most caring was once person to person. Now much of it is mediated through institutions — often large, powerful, impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one more just and more caring and providing opportunity for people to grow, the most effective and economical way, while supportive of the social order, is to raise the performance as servant of as many institutions as possible by new voluntary regenerative forces initiated within them by committed individuals: *servants*.

Such servants may never predominate or even be numerous; but their influence may form a leaven that makes possible a reasonably civilized society.

ROBERT K. GREENLEAF

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TEN YEARS AGO I started to write on the theme of *servant*. These have been interesting years because responses have brought involvement in some depth with persons and institutions that share my concern. In this process, others have contributed much to my understanding of what may be required for our society to become more serving — to make a substantial move toward a quality of the common life that is reasonable and possible with available resources, human and material.

To such as I who did not write for publication until age sixty-five, this understanding has come rather late in life. In summing it up now, I would like to share some reflections on these past ten years. Then I will speculate on the prospects, as I see them, for the servant motive in the future. But, first, a note about where I have been.

Organization — How Things Get Done

The major focus of my adult life may best be described as: *a student of organization, how things get done* — particularly in large institutions. Fortuitous advice from a wise college professor helped shape this interest and led me, upon graduation, to find my way into the largest business organization in the world, American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Early on I became a student of the history of what seemed to me to be an extraordinary institution. I managed to carve out a career in which I could be both involved and within watching distance

of its top structure, and yet maintain sufficient detachment so that I could be reflective about what was going on. My tenure embraced the expansion of the 1920's, the depression, World War II and the growth years of the 1950's and 1960's. I never carried heavy executive responsibility and was spared the debilitating effects of such a role which seem almost inevitable, given conventional organizational structures.

In the latter part of my career I held the position of Director of Management Research. With the help of a professional staff and within a broad charter, I could both study and advise regarding the management and leadership of this huge institution — over one million employees — immersed as it is in sophisticated technology, elaborate human organization, and regulated public service. I was concerned, among other things, with its values, with its history and myth, and, intimately with its top leadership. I learned the hard way about the profound influence that history, and the myths of institutions that have a considerable history, have on values, goals, and leadership. And I was painfully aware of the cost in these terms of any insensitivity to history and myth — especially among the top officers. In any institutional setting, one really cannot understand one's involvement in it *now* without a clear sense of the course of events that form that institution's past, out of which grows the mythology that surrounds the record of those events. History and myth, in my view, need each other in order to illuminate the present.

This experience at A T & T gave me a good perspective and the impetus, in my retirement years that began in 1964, to venture into close working relationships with a wide range of institutions: universities (especially in the turbulent sixties), foundations (as trustee, consultant, and staff member), churches (local, regional, and national) and related church institutions, professional associations, and businesses — in the U.S., in Europe, and in the third world.

This post-retirement experience, following thirty-eight years with A T & T, has been enriching and stimulating; but one facet of it, in particular, prompted me to begin to write and to pull together a thread of thinking that has emerged around the *servant* theme.

The servant theme evolved out of close association with several colleges and universities during their disturbed period in the 1960's. This was a searing experience, to be intimately involved with students,

faculty, administrators, and trustees at a time when some of these venerable institutions literally crumbled — when the hoops came off the barrel.

The first essay, *The Servant as Leader*, was prompted by my concern for student attitudes which then — and now, although the manifestations are different — seemed low in hope. One cannot be hopeful, it seems to me, unless one accepts, and believes that one can live productively in, the world as it is — striving, violent, unjust, as well as beautiful, caring, and supportive. I hold that hope, thus defined, is absolutely essential to both sanity and wholeness of life.

Partly in search for a structural basis for hope, partly out of awareness that our vast complex of institutions — particularly colleges and universities in the late sixties — seemed so fragile and inadequate, two further essays were written: *The Institution as Servant* and *Trustees as Servants*. The three essays were then collected in a book with some related writings and published by Paulist Press in 1977 under the title *Servant Leadership*. Another projected esasy, *The Servant as a Person*, turned out to be a book and was published by Paulist Press in 1979 with the title *Teacher as Servant, a Parable*.

Out of the struggle to write these things, while contending with the modest ferment they stirred, came the belief that, as a world society, we have not yet come to grips with the *institutional revolution* that came hard on the heels of the industrial revolution, and that we confront a world-wide crisis of institutional leadership. How can we ordinary mortals lead governments, businesses, churches, hospitals, schools, philanthropies, communities — yes, even families — to become more serving in this turbulent world? And what does it mean to serve? I prefer not to define *serve* explicitly at this time. Rather I would let the meaning it has for me evolve as one reads through this essay.

How can an institution become more serving? I see no other way than that the people who inhabit it serve better and work together toward synergy — the whole becoming greater than the sum of its parts.

I believe that the transforming movement that raises the serving quality of any institution, large or small, begins with the initiative of one individual person — no matter how large the institution or how substantial the movement. If one accepts, as I do, the principle of synergy, one has difficulty with the idea that *only* small is beautiful. The potential for beauty (largely unrealized to be sure) is much greater

in large institutions — because of the phenomenon of synergy. Because we are now dominated by large institutions, how to make *big* also *beautiful* may be a major challenge for the late twentieth century.

How to achieve *community* under the shelter of bigness may be the essence of this challenge because so much of caring depends upon knowing and interacting with persons in the intimacy of propinquity. The stimulus and support that some individuals need to be open to inspiration and imaginative insight often come from the nurture of groups. There may not be a "group mind" (inspiration and imaginative insight may be gifts only to individuals), but there is clearly a climate favorable to creativity by individuals that the group, as community, can provide. Achieving many small scale communities, under the shelter that is best given by bigness, may be the secret of synergy in large institutions.

The Idea of Servant

The idea of *servant* is deep in our Judeo-Christian heritage. The concordance to the Standard Revised Version of the Bible lists over 1,300 references to *servant* (including serve and service). Yet, after all of these millenia, there is ample evidence that ours is a low-caring society when judged by what is reasonable and possible with the resources at hand. There are many notable servants among us, but they seem, in our time, to be losing ground to the neutral or nonserving people. It is argued that the outlook for our civilization at this moment is not promising, probably because not enough of us care enough for our fellow humans.

I am hopeful for the future because knowledge is available to do two things that we are not now doing, things that are well within our means to do and that would give caring people great joy to do, things that would infuse more of the servant quality into our society. (1) We know how to mature the servant motive as a durable thing in many who arrive in their 'teens with servanthood latent in them — and this, I believe, is quite a large number. This is what my book *Teacher as Servant* is about. (2) We know how to transform institutions so that they will be substantially more serving to all who are touched by them. A chapter in *Teacher as Servant* deals with such a transformation. But formidable obstacles stand in the way of using this knowledge, obstacles that I will call "mind sets".

The Problem of Mind Sets

Mind sets that seem to restrain otherwise good able people from using the two bits of knowledge mentioned above are often tough and unyielding. Whether obstacles like these can be sufficiently reduced before the deterioration of this civilization has become irreversible is open to question. For the older ones among us who are "in charge", nothing short of a "peak" experience, like religious conversion or psychoanalysis or an overpowering new vision seems to have much chance of converting a confirmed nonservant into an affirmative servant. But for some, those few older ones who have a glimmer of the servant disposition *now*, it is worth their making the effort to try to stem the tide of deterioration. Life can be more whole for those who try, regardless of the outcome.

Civilizations have risen and fallen before. If ours does not make it, perhaps when the archeologists of some future civilization dig around among the remains of this one they may find traces of the effort to build a more caring society, bits of experience that may give useful cues to future people. It is a reasonable prospect that, in the civilization that succeeds ours — whether it evolves from ours in a constructive way or whether it is reconstructed from the ruins after long dark ages — those future people will be faced by the same two problems that confront us now: (1) *how to produce as many servants as they can from those who, at maturity, have the potential for it*; and (2) *how to elicit optimal service from such group endeavors (institutions) as emerge*. And, unless some unforeseeable transmutations in human nature occur along the way, those future people may be impeded by the same unwillingness to use what they know that marks our times. Knowledge may be power, but not without the willingness, and the release from inhibiting mind sets, to use that knowledge.

Over a century ago when the then stagnant Danish culture was reconstructed as a result of the work of the Folk High School, the motto of that effort was *The Spirit is Power*. A chapter in the essay *The Servant as Leader* tells the story of a remarkable social transformation that followed when the spirit of the Danish young people was aroused so that they sought to find a way out of their dilemma, a stagnant culture, by building a new social order.

Worth noting about this nineteenth century Danish experience is that Bishop Grundtvig, the prophetic visionary who gave leadership to the Folk High School movement, did not offer a model for others to follow,

nor did he himself found or direct such a school. He gave the vision, the dream, and he passionately and persuasively advocated that dream for over fifty years of his long life. The indigenous leaders among the peasants of Denmark responded to that vision and built the schools — with no model to guide them. *They knew how to do it!* Grundtvig gave the prophetic vision that inspired them to act on what they knew.

Vision for Our Times, Where Is It?

Where there is no vision, the people perish. This language (Proverbs XXIX: 18) from the King James Version of the Bible stays with me even though modern translators make something else of that passage.

What Grundtvig gave to the indigenous leaders of the common people of Denmark in the 19th century was a compelling vision that they should do something that they knew how to do: *they could raise the spirit of young people so that they would build a new society — and they did.* Without that vision, 19th century Denmark was on the way to perishing.

Our restless young people in the sixties wanted to build a new society too. But their elders who could have helped prepare them for that task just "spun their wheels". (They had been spinning them for a long time — and still do.) As a consequence of this neglect, a few of those young people, in the sixties, simply settled for tearing up the place. And, in the absence of a new visionary leader to inspire effort to prepare our young people to build constructively, some of them may tear up the place again! Do not be surprised if they do just that. The provocation is ample. We simply are not giving the maturing help to young people that is well within our means to do. Oh, we are spending enough money on them; perhaps too much. But we are acting on the principle that knowledge, not the spirit, is power. Knowledge is but a tool. The spirit is of the essence.

Perhaps the oldsters who could help them do not do what they know how to do because, as in the 1960's, they are not inspired by a vision that lifts their sights to act on what they know. No such vision is being given in our times. And the paralysis of action that restrains us in preparing young people to live productively in the 21st century is still with us. We old ones may be courting disaster by our neglect.

This is an interesting thesis (as said earlier): (1) we (some of us) know how to increase the proportion of young people who, at maturity, are

disposed to be servants; and (2) we (some of us) know how to transform contemporary institutions so that they will be substantially more serving to all who are touched by them. What is needed, this thesis holds, is a vision that will lift the sights of those who know and release their will to act constructively. This vision might be prompted by conscience and self-generated out of a conscious search, or it may be without known cause, or it might be forcefully communciated by a strong leader-type person (as Grundtvig did in 19th century Denmark).

This leader might present a vision that has a benign result, as Grundtvig did, or he might be a leader like Adolph Hitler who brought a major disaster, or the vision might be given by an Elvis Presley who can release the inhibiting constraints and incite a frenzy of action that has no seeming value-laden consequence, good or bad.

The late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel had given a lecture on the Old Testament Prophets to an undergraduate audience. In the question period a student asked, "Rabbi Heschel, you spoke of false prophets and true prophets. How does one tell the difference?"

The good rabbi drew himself into the stern stance of the prophet of old and answered in measured tones, "There — is — no — way!" and looked intently at his questioner for an embarrassing moment. Then his face broke into a gentle smile and he said, "My friend, if there were a "way", if we had a gauge that we could slip over the head of the prophet and say with certainty that he is or is not a true prophet, there would be no human dilemma and life would have no meaning." Then, returning to his stern Old Testament stance he said emphatically, "But it is terribly important that we know the difference."

Thus, one who is inspired by a vision must know the difference between an action that points toward a benign, as contrasted with a destructive result, or simply aimless activity. I believe it is possible to prepare most of the emerging adults to know the difference. This is the first step, as I see it, in increasing the proportion of young people who are disposed to be servants. My book, *Teacher as Servant*, describes how a teacher on his own and without the support of either colleagues or university, can prepare young people to know the difference. I will comment later on one other opportunity within colleges and universities. Neither approach costs any money!

What Do We Know — or Don't Want to Know?

I have said that (1) we know how to increase the proportion of young

people who, at maturity, are disposed to be servants, and (2) we know how to transform institutions so that they will be substantially more serving to all who are touched by them. But it is not knowledge that is codified and systematized and bearing the appropriate establishment imprimatur. It is knowledge like that which the leaders among the Danish peasants had when they were inspired to build schools which would kindle the spirit of their young people. They had always known how to do that, but until Bishop Grundtvig gave them the vision, they were unable, or lacked the will, to act on what they knew.

There is nothing mystical about the available knowledge to do the two things (as suggested above) that need to be done in our times to raise the servant quality of our society. To my knowledge, clear and complete models do not exist, but there are fragments of experience here and there that can readily be assembled to give a workable basis for moving to solidify that experience — *to know*. Let me give examples from four widely differing contemporary institutions in which, it seems to me, able honest people lack the vision to act on what they know — or could easily know — *and seem not to want to know*. They seem to have mind sets that block them.

Business

A certain important industrial field is occupied by half a dozen large companies and many small and medium sized ones. It is a field that is subject to quite wide cyclical economic fluctuations and in which disruptions by labor disputes are common. One of the larger companies (not the largest) stands in conspicuous contrast to the other large ones on three counts: no matter what happens to the economic fortunes of the others, this firm, up to now, has always made money; they have never had a strike or work stoppage; their product is generally recognized as superior. (What makes their product superior will be commented on later.)

Let us call this company X. A close observer of this industry recently asked the head of one of the other large companies in this field this simple question, "What do you folks learn from company X?" The response was a hand gesture of dismissal and the brusque comment, "I don't want to talk about it!"

One can speculate about why, in a highly competitive field, the head of one large company would brush off a suggestion that he might learn

something from a much more successful competitor. But what distinguishes company X from its competitors is not in the dimensions that usually separate companies, such as superior technology, more astute marketing strategy, better financial base, etc. Company X is not too different from its competitors in dimensions like these. What separates company X from the rest is unconventional thinking about its "dream" — what this business wants to be, how its priorities are set, and how it organizes to serve. It has a radically different philosophy and self-image. According to the conventional business wisdom, company X ought not to succeed at all. Conspicuously less successful competitors seem to say, "The ideas that company X holds *ought* not to work, therefore we will learn nothing from them." They "don't want to talk about it."

University

In the field of higher education there is another consequence of a lack of vision that cannot be as clearly identified as in the above business example. For many years I have tried to stir an interest in universities in making a more determined effort to develop the servant leadership potential that exists among their students. When new money is produced to support such an effort a pass will be made at doing it. But when the money stops, the effort stops. It does not take root. Here and there the occasional professor, on his own, without the support of his university, and sometimes with the opposition of his colleagues, has taken an interest in this aspect of student growth — with conspicuous success.

In contrast, a student with athletic potential will find elaborate coaching resources available to develop this talent — even in the poorest and feeblest of institutions. But the young potential servant leader will find that the position of the best and strongest university is that the development of leadership potential is something that just happens, and nothing explicit is to be done about it in the crucial undergraduate years. Last year I wrote an article about this in an educational journal stating that the only way I see for work in the undergraduate years to help alleviate the leadership crisis we seem now to be in is to find and encourage the rare professor who will take it on — unrecognized and uncompensated — and perhaps denigrated by his colleagues. A university president responded to my article with this concurring comment:

*HUMANITAS (Duquesne University, November 1978) *The Crisis of Leadership*

"I am coming more and more to agree with your opinion that it is almost impossible to mount anything like an organized program in developing leadership in our university students. Reluctantly, I am reaching your conclusion that the best and only hope of success will be an effort on the part of a few dedicated individuals who will take that cross upon themselves. If this is truly the case, then we need to try to discover who and where they are and give them all the assistance we can."

When John W. Gardner wrote his sharp criticism of universities for administering what he called the *Antileadership Vaccine* (his parting message when he left the Presidency of Carnegie Corporation for a career in politics in 1964) the response from academe seemed to be, "We don't want to talk about it!"

Health Profession

In the medical profession, there is a widely held position against accepting nutrition as an important factor in health. The average doctor knows that the human body is a chemical-psychic organism. But, in treating illness or in advice regarding health building, there is not much concern for nutrition.

The Hill Foundation in St. Paul, Minn., which has a long record of generous giving to medical education, recently made a grant to establish a program in nutrition in a *new* medical school. The foundation's annual report for 1973 commented on this grant as follows:

"It is a true paradox: Americans are often overweight and undernourished. We are wasteful of our food assets and unwise in our dietary patterns; meanwhile, much of the rest of the world struggles to assure its people an adequate food supply. There is an immediate need for more basic research in nutrition; more communication on ways to plan and control food production, processing, preservation and preparation; and for more public education on sound nutritional practices. But the fact is that there are too few well-trained people to perform this task. . .

"An important aspect of the nutrition problem is related to the medical school curriculum. Few medical schools have major departments devoted to the field of nutrition research and education. Generally the young doctor gets a briefing on aspects of nutrition as they relate to specific diseases such as diabetes, allergies or coronary problems. Most of the emphasis, however, is on the remedial care of

patients, with little attention devoted to the maintenance of health or the prevention of illness. . . .The same weaknesses exist in the training of such paramedical personnel as nurses and dietitians. . . .The Foundation believes Mayo Medical School ideally suited to develop and implement a broad nutrition education program *because it is a new institution* (italics ours), and hence is still flexible in its approach to medical training."

What this says to me is that the mind set among doctors on nutrition is such that only a new medical school will offer a chance to use fully the available nutritional knowledge as an important factor in health building. The medical establishment would seem to say, as the head of the business said when asked what he learned from his more successful, but unconventional competitor, "We don't want to talk about it!"

Church Leader

My interpretation of a bit of 19th century history is that when Karl Marx sat in the British Museum composing the doctrines that would shape so much of the 20th century world, he was filling a void that was left by the failure of the churches of his day to deal adequately with the consequences of the industrial revolution. If the 19th century churches (or church leaders) had taken the trouble to suggest a design for the new society that the industrial revolution made imperative, and if they had advocated it persuasively as a new vision, Marx might still have written his tracts; but they would not have found the field relatively unoccupied.

Recently I met with a group of church leaders, professionals, who were convened for three days on the subject of "The Churchman as Leader". I listened for a day as they discussed their leadership opportunities and problems as they saw them. Then, in commenting on what I had heard I noted three words that are sometimes used interchangeably but have quite different connotations: *manage* (from manus — hand) suggesting control; *administer* (from administrare — to serve) suggesting to care for; and *lead*, of uncertain origin, but commonly used to mean "going out ahead to show the way". Manage and administer, along with the ceremonial aspects of office, are the *maintenance* functions — they help keep the institution running smoothly — *as it is*. Important as maintenance is in the current performance of any institution, it does not assure adaptation to serve a changing society. That assurance can only come from *leading* — ven-

turing creatively. Having made this distinction in the meaning of terms as they are commonly used, I commented that, as I observed their discussion, these churchmen were talking mostly about *maintenance*, not *leading*.

In most institutions, churches included, managing and administering, the maintenance functions, are delegated and resources are allocated in order that those to whom these functions are assigned can carry on. Those who manage and administer (maintain) may also *lead — go out ahead to show the way*. But leadership is not delegated; *it is assumed*. If there are sanctions to compel or induce compliance, the process would not qualify as leadership. The only test of leadership is that somebody follows — *voluntarily*.

At this point I was asked by the church leaders, "If you do not see us as *leading*, in your terms, what could persons in positions like ours do in order to lead?"

I repeated my credo, as stated in the beginning of this essay, which concludes with ". . .If a better society is to be built, one more just and caring and providing opportunity for people to grow,the most open course, the most effective and economical way, while supportive of the social order, is to raise the performance as servant of as many institutions as possible by new voluntary regenerative forces initiated within them by committed individuals — *servants*." Then I said:

"What church leaders can do to really *lead* in our times is to use their influence to bring into being a contemporary *theology of institutions* that will underwrite the commitment of church members within our many institutions and support them as they become new regenerative forces: to the end that their particular institution, in which they have some power of influence, will become more serving — and continue to grow in its capacity to serve.

"The leadership of the nineteenth century churches did not accept the challenge to suggest a new design for a post-industrial revolution society, and they left a void to be filled by a concerned and articulate atheist. The leaders of late-twentieth-century churches are not accepting the challenge of an institution-bound society (which Marx did not provide for in his doctrines and, as a consequence, Marxist societies today have the same problem in getting their institutions to serve as we have.) The opportunity that church leaders have today is to take the initiative to see that an adequate theology of institutions evolves so that churches have a firm basis for preparing their members to become

regenerative servants in the institutions with which they are involved. *Leadership is initiating — going out ahead to show the way.*"

There was not much response to this suggestion in the meeting of church leaders. When we concluded I noted this paucity of response and said that I would write to them about it when I got home. I later sent to those present a memorandum entitled "The Need for a Theology of Institutions", in which I suggested a detailed procedure that a church leader might follow in producing this new theology. Only two of the sixteen present at the conference acknowledged the receipt of the memo, and they were noncommittal. A supplementary memorandum six months later got the same response.

I would conclude that these church leaders — all responsible, able, good people — took the same position as the head of the business did when asked what he learned from his much more successful (if unconventional) competitor: "We don't want to talk about it!"

When 19th century church leaders were confronted with the radical impact of the industrial revolution, if some audacious consultant had suggested that a new theology was needed to deal with this problem, the response of church leaders of that day might have been the same — "we don't want to talk about it."

My reflection on these last ten years leads me to conclude that *vision*, without which we perish, is required to open us to willingness to use what we know and to work to extract hard reality from a dream. In the absence of a powerful liberating vision, church leaders, like others in responsible roles, "don't want to talk about it." Why, over such a long span of history, has the production of vision been so difficult to do? Why are these liberating visions so rare?

Why Are Liberating Visions So Rare?

It seems to me important to accept that the mind sets that are so frustrating to all reformers, those who are urging others to use what they know, actually serve a useful purpose. What if every person and every institution was "open" in the sense of being free of all inhibiting mind sets that block action on what we know? Every question and every situation would be faced as if nothing like it had happened before. This would be a reformer's dream; but the world would be in chaos. Few of us can survive without a good deal of dogma that prompts reflexive actions. We would not be able to act quickly in emergencies, and moral choices that require prompt action would paralyze us. Most of us get

along as well as we do by a good deal of "what if?" anticipatory thinking that pre-sets responses to common situations. If we were all completely "open", much of our traditional wisdom might be lost, as might "manners" that enable us to interact spontaneously in appropriate ways with fellow humans.

Liberating visions are rare because ours is partly a traditional society — but only partly. It is also an evolving society about which Cardinal Newman is quoted as saying, "To live is to change; to live well is to have changed often." The mixture of *traditional* and *changing* is an important aspect of the human dilemma.

Therefore, in answer to the question, why are liberating visions so rare? one must say that they are rare because a stable society requires that *a powerful liberating vision must be difficult to deliver*, and that the test for the benign character of such a vision shall be rigorous. Yet to have none, or not enough such visions, is to seal our fate. We cannot turn back to be a wholly traditional society, comforting as it may be to contemplate it. There must be change — sometimes great change.

Moods and spirit of people vary. There are moments when people are more open to charismatic vision than others. Some times seem "plastic", others seem "hard". We but dimly understand the forces that open and close people to liberating visions.

The word *prudence* comes to mind. We should try to change with a minimum of threat of damage to stability — as embodied in the four kinds of mind sets I have described. If stability is significantly lowered or lost, no matter how noble the end sought, the cost in human suffering may be inordinate. Then an imprudent effort toward change, one in which the liberating vision is not sufficiently compelling and benign in intent, may make it more difficult for a later prudent effort to succeed. Reformers take note: in the end, most people choose *order* — even if it is delivered to them by brutal nonservants. The ultimate choice of order is one of the most predictable mind sets because it is a first condition of a civilized society.

If the writer in Proverbs XXIX: 18 is correctly quoted in saying "Where there is no vision, the people perish," there is remarkable consistency between the common dilemmas in ancient times and in ours. The four examples of firm mind sets in the fields of business, education, health, and church suggest that there has been failure to give sufficiently powerful liberating visions. This kind of deprivation has been

the common lot of human kind from the earliest times. And because of that the threat of perishing is always with us.

Summoning and Articulating a Vision

So far I have given only half an answer to the question, why are liberating visions so rare? — because it is so difficult to give them. The other half is: because so few of those who have the gift for summoning a vision, and the power to articulate it persuasively, have either the urge or the courage or the will to try! And it takes all three. We in America may be in a transition period between an era of "growth" and one of "restraint" and liberating visions may have a hollow sound. This is discouraging to visionaries!

One of the requirements of a caring, serving society, in both favorable and discouraging times, is that it provides in its structures a place for visionaries and surrounds those in that place with the expectation that they will produce those liberating visions of which they are capable. A new view of a structure of the institutions that serve us may be in order — a view that embraces both internal structure as well as the relationship between institutions and how they influence one another.

When *The Servant as Leader* was written ten years ago I had this to say about prophetic vision:

> "I now embrace the theory of prophecy which holds that prophetic voices of great clarity, and with a quality of insight equal to that of any age, are speaking cogently all of the time. Men and women of a stature equal to the greatest of the past are with us now addressing the problems of the day and pointing to a better way and to a personeity better able to live fully and serenely in these times.
>
> "The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision may be in the interest, the level of seeking, and the responsiveness of the *hearers*. The variable may not be in the presence or absence or the relative quality and force of prophetic voices. The prophet grows in stature as people respond to his message. If his or her early attempts are ignored or spurned, the talent may wither away.
>
> "It is *seekers*, then, who make the prophet; and the initiative of any of us in searching for and responding to the voice of a contemporary prophet may mark the turning point in her or his growth and service."

I came by this point of view from reading the history of the Society of Friends (Quakers), and I concluded that George Fox, the powerful seventeenth century voice in England that gave this Society its remarkable vision, probably would not have been heard had there not been in existence in England for a hundred years prior a group known as *seekers*. This was a small band of people whose common bond was that they were *listening* for prophetic vision. They were held together by a religious concern but they knew that it lacked articulation in a contemporary formulation that would make of them a vital social and religious force in their day. And as they heard and responded to George Fox, they became for a short time a great movement that had a remarkable impact on English institutions, notably a new business ethic and a pervasive social concern that influenced the western world and carried forward to eighteenth century America where it made of the Quakers the first religious group to formally condemn slavery and forbid slaveholding among its members — 100 years before the Civil War.

But this movement very quickly crystalized into a church as too many of its members ceased to be seekers. Instead of *seeking*, being open to new prophecy, *they "had it"*, tested and tried — what churches have always done. What they had was, and remains, good. But the Quakers were no longer on the growing edge.

The servant leader may be not so much the prophetic visionary (that is a rare gift) as the convenor, sustainer, discerning guide for seekers who wish to remain open to prophetic visions. The *maintenance* functions within all sorts of institutions may not require leaders of any sort, but, in my view of things, *seekers*, of which every institution should have some, *must* have servant leaders. But from where, in our vast complex of institutions, will liberating visions come? I have a suggestion.

A Structure of Institutions that Encourages Liberating Visions

In search for a structure that encourages liberating visions, the institutions that make up our society might be arranged in a three-level hierarchy.

In the base level are what may be called "operating" institutions: governments, businesses, hospitals, schools, labor unions, professional associations, social agencies, philanthropies, families, communities.

In the second level are churches and universities, because of their concern for values and for continuity of the culture, and because of their

capacity for nurturing the serving quality in both individuals and institutions.

At the third level are seminaries (theological and nontheological) that are sustaining resources for churches, and foundations that could perform a similar service for colleges and universities. Both foundations and seminaries are suggested because they have sufficient detachment and freedom from daily pressures to maintain a reflective overview of the whole society, and because they have greater latitude than most institutions to be what they want to be and to do what they think they should. They have the unusual opportunity to harbor and encourage prophetic voices that give vision and hope. *Unfortunately, in our times, little prophetic vision seems to come from either seminaries or foundations.*

Further, foundations and seminaries have the opportunity to become the source of nurturing that is mediated through churches and universities to individuals and operating institutions. Thus a major preoccupation of seminaries and foundations might become *the nurture of institutions* — institutions that in turn serve people. And it is hoped that, in time *all* institutions will come to acknowledge their insufficiency and their need for constant nurture from a source that has the necessary detachment and freedom from daily pressures. I suggest that this source could be foundations and seminaries.

The utility in such an idea of a hierarchy of institutions is that when there is faltering in any institution, as there is likely to be in the best of them from time to time, a fair question to ask is, wherein has there been a lack of caring concern for this institution from the level next above?

This assumption leaves the question, to whom do seminaries and foundations turn when they need caring concern? Since these two stand at the top of the hierarchy, there are no resource institutions that serve them. Therefore, seminaries and foundations need a quality and depth of trustee care that would not be possible for all institutions. These two kinds of institutions need the most dedicated and discerning trustees of all. And these trustees have the greatest of all opportunities for constructive service to the society of the future. The opportunities are great, but the challenge to astuteness of trustee leadership is also great — because most seminaries and foundations, as they now stand, have well set patterns that do not favor their occupying the role I have described as possible, and natural, for them as level three institutions — at the top of the hierarchy.

Seminaries

As seminaries have evolved they have tended to take on the values and mind sets of universities. A few of them are schools within university structures. But most are independent institutions with their own trustees, even where they are affiliated with religious denominations.

If seminaries take on the full scope I will suggest, they will not be at all like universities. To be sure, they have a curriculum of courses and they grant degrees. But this, as I see it, is incidental to their major function: to harbor and nurture prophetic voices that give vision and hope, and to serve as a sustaining support for churches. These are not primary functions of a university, and the university tradition may not be useful as a model for seminaries.

I have a gnawing suspicion that the strongest role, a viable structural model for a late twentieth century seminary, has not yet evolved. It is the opportunity for seminary trustees, under the leadership of their chairperson, to help the seminary get into its strongest role. It is not the trustee mission to design the seminary, authoritatively. Rather, trustees have the opportunity to *lead* a process out of which the design for the seminary of the twenty-first century may evolve. All of the several constituencies of each seminary should be full participants in the evolution of that design. And it should be *evolution*, over time — and never ending. The seminary should rest firm, at all times, in its contemporary mission, while the process of transcending that mission is carried forward simultaneously.

As trustees undertake to lead their seminary toward its full stature as a serving (level three) institution, one of their concerns should be for the seminary to make, out of its own experience, a contribution to an evolving theology of institutions — a theology that gives a critical contemporary view of the purpose and program of both seminary and church. This concern, consistently manifest, will help clarify the goals of the seminary. It will also help prepare the seminary to support the churches in their ministry, both to individuals and to the full range of "operating" institutions that churches have the opportunity to influence, to the end that these institutions will be more serving of all persons whose lives they touch.

Seminaries differ widely in their doctrinal positions; but most share the desire to bring about conditions of life that will favor all persons reaching their full stature as religious beings (in the root meaning of the

word religion). It is regarding this common goal that new vision is needed.

Foundations

Foundations, as institutions with funds to dispense for legally approved purposes, are a relatively recent addition to our extensive gallery of institutions. There is considerable disagreement as to what the function of foundations should be and there are persistent public pressures to restrict their autonomy. There is some sentiment that foundations should not exist at all, or only for a limited term of years.

Foundations are unique in that they are free of "market" pressures. All other institutions have constituencies that must be satisfied if they are to continue to exist. Foundations have only to obey the law — which is stricter than it once was, and may get more so.

While foundations still have some latitude to choose what they will do, it is suggested that some of them elect to become, in part at least, support institutions for universities and colleges — not just to give them money, although they may continue to do some of that. Could not some foundations become for universities and colleges what seminaries now are (or could be) for churches? This will not come about quickly or easily, but foundation trustees might assume the kind of leadership suggested above for seminary trustees: leadership to a process out of which the design for a foundation role for the twenty-first century will evolve.

Large sophisticated businesses sometimes set aside staffs whose role is to think about the firm as an institution, and give intellectual guidance to its development. Universities tend to rely on committees of faculty to render this kind of service to the university itself; and it is not enough. American railroads are the classic example of large businesses that did not set people aside to think about the business they were in. Everybody was busy running the railroad day to day. And few railroads survived this neglect as viable businesses. There is some question that universities will survive, unharmed, from their own self neglect; and they have been badly scarred in recent years.

It probably will be more difficult for a foundation to become effective in this support role for universities than for seminaries to do it for churches. This is partly because of the great size and complexity of some universities as well as the scarcity of persons who could (or would) staff a foundation that undertakes this difficult task. As with seminaries the

prime concern is *trustees*. Trustees of a foundation that uses its resources for this important purpose will need to be unusually caring and dedicated and persevere over a long period. They will accept the fact that their foundation must *earn* the kind of role suggested here.

Some universities and colleges face a drop in enrollment and are experiencing financial stringencies. They have difficulty thinking of any problem they now have as other than something that more money would solve. As a somewhat detached observer, I suspect that universities and colleges are suffering — even today — more for want of ideas, and for vision to liberate them to use ideas, than for want of money. If their governing ideas were better suited to their needs and opportunities in these times, the want of money might not be such a problem. But, the university tradition being what it is, it is unlikely that they have the power to be sufficently self-regenerating. They, like the churches, need the sustained caring support that only a most able foundation staff is likely to give.

It is humbling for any institution to accept that it is not self-regenerating and that it should welcome conceptual leadership from another institution like a foundation — one that has the resources, human and material, to give that help, and that has managed to assemble a few unusually able trustees whose exceptionality give the foundation self-regenerating power. Most universities, like most people and institutions, could use a good measure of humility. Humility is one of the distinguishing traits of the true servant — as willing humbly to accept service as to give it.

Self-regenerating Institutions

Continuous regeneration is essential for viability of persons and institutions and society as a whole. A prudent use of human resources is to concentrate the ablest trustees, who will always be few in number, in those institutions that are best positioned to be self-regenerating and thereby to gain the strength to give clear and compelling regenerating vision to others.

If seminaries and foundations can be accepted as being appropriately placed in the hierarchy of institutions to assume this guiding role (as I believe they are), then a concerted effort should be made to provide these two kinds of institutions with trustees who will persevere with determination to assure sustained self-regeneration in themselves in order to give strong support to churches (by seminaries) and colleges and

universities (by foundations) with the hope that, between the influence of churches and universities, "operating" institutions will be helped to a sustained high level of caring and serving.

Institutes of Chairing

One of the practical steps that foundations and seminaries might take, collectively or separately, is the conduct of institutes for those who chair trustees. They could do this, first, for themselves to prepare their own chairpersons to give the leadership that will help assure the quality of trustee oversight that self-regenerating institutions require. The Institutes could then extend the availability of this chairing preparation to universities and colleges, and to churches and church-related institutions so that, between them, they would provide this service for those who chair the trustees of all operating institutions that have trustees or directors. Such Institutes of Chairing would be a permanent thing: to give initial and continuing preparation for the chair leadership; to serve as a medium of exchange between those who undertake this role; and to provide a consulting resource for chairpersons who want help on specific problems.

This is a large order. But if the voluntary character of our complex society is to be preserved and enhanced, a major investment in strengthening and maintaining the trustee role of all institutions that have governing boards seems imperative. This is one of those invaluable social supports that we know how to provide and that we can afford to supply. What is needed, first, is a liberating vision that will make it a feasible thing to do. Where better might we look for that liberating vision than among seminaries and foundations? If just *one* in each category will take it on and advocate that vision persuasively and with spirit, they may infect the rest. Visions, both good and bad, can be contagious. An *Institute of Chairing* could be one of the good ones.

I suggest that a prime concern of all seminaries and foundations could be to become self-regenerating institutions — with their own able and caring trustees. They could stand as models for the others.

Servant Leadership — by Persuasion

In my personal credo stated earlier I said: "If a better society is to be built, one more just and more caring and providing opportunity for people to grow, the most effective and economical way, while supportive of the social order, is to raise the performance as servant of as

many institutions as possible by new voluntary regenerative forces initiated within them by committed individuals — *servants*."

So far I have not found it helpful to define servant and serving in other terms than the consequences of the serving on the one being served or on others who may be affected by the action. In *Teacher as Servant* I describe a semifictional servant in some detail.

In the first essay ten years ago, *The Servant as Leader*, the definition was: "Do those being served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will she or he benefit, or, at least, be not further deprived?" I would now add one further stipulation: "No one will knowingly be hurt by the action, *directly or indirectly*."

Thus the servant (in my view) would reject the "utilitarian" position which would accept a very large gain in, say, justice, at the cost of a small but real hurt to some. The servant (in my view) would reject the nonviolent tactic for social change, however noble the intent, if, as a consequence, some who are disposed to violence are likely to resort to it, or some may be threatened or coerced. (I would fault Mahondas Gandhi on these grounds. Great leader and tremendous person that he was, I do not find his tactic an appropriate model for the *servant*. John Woolman, as described in *Servant as Leader*, is for me such a model).

The servant (in my view) would reject the rapid accomplishment of any desirable social goal by coercion in favor of the slower process of persuasion — even if no identifiable person was hurt by the coercion.

To some determined reformers, such a set of beliefs would lead to paralysis of action. The servant (in my view) is generally a "gradualist." And, while granting that, in an imperfect world, because we have not yet learned how to do better, coercion by governments and some other institutions will be needed to restrain some destructive actions and to provide some services best rendered authoritatively, the servant will stand as the advocate of persuasion in human affairs to the largest extent possible.

This view is supported by a belief about the nature of human kind, a belief that leads to a view of persuasion as the critical skill of servant leadership. Such a leader is one who ventures and takes the risks of going out ahead to show the way and whom others follow, *voluntarily, because they are persuaded that the leader's path is the right one — for them*, probably better than they could devise for themselves.

One is persuaded, I believe, on arrival at a feeling of rightness about a belief or action through one's own intuitive sense — checked, perhaps, by others' intuitive judgment, but, in the end, one relies on ones own intuitive sense. One takes that intuitive step, from the closest approximation to certainty one can reach by conscious logic (sometimes not very close), to that state in which one may say with conviction, "This is where I stand!" The act of persuasion will help order the logic and favor the intuitive step. And this takes time! The one being persuaded must take that intuitive step alone, untrammeled by coercion or manipulative stratagems. Both leader and follower respect the integrity and allow the autonomy of the other; and each encourages the other to find her or his own intuitive confirmation of the rightness of the belief or action.

To the servant (as I view that person), *persuasion*, thus defined, stands in sharp contrast to *coercion* (the use, or threat of use, of covert or overt sanctions or penalties, the exploitation of weaknesses or sentiments, or any application of pressure). Persuasion also stands in sharp contrast to *manipulation* (guiding people into beliefs or actions that they do not fully understand).

If one accepts such definitions, has the servant become limited to a passive role and yielded the carrying of the tougher burdens to those with fewer scruples? No, I do not believe so; not if the preparation of servants can begin when they are young. There are some old and valuable burden carriers around who are much too coercive and manipulative; and they might lose their usefulness if they attempted too radical change. It may be better to tolerate their ways as long as they are useful, so long as they do not hurt others.

I realize that in adding to the definition of servant the admonition "no one will knowingly be hurt", some people who might otherwise think of themselves as servants (as I have defined it) will reject that identification. The problem is that some do not believe they can carry the leadership roles they now have without causing some hurt, or that necessary social changes can be made without some being hurt.

In an imperfect world, some will continue to be hurt, as they always have been. I know that, in the course of my life, I have caused some hurt. But, as my concern for servanthood has evolved, the scars from these incidents are more prominent in my memory and self-questioning is sharper: could I have been more aware, more patient, more gentle, more forgiving, more skillful? The intent of the servant, as I see that

person now, is that, as a result of any action she or he initiates, *no one will knowingly be hurt*. And if somone *is* hurt, there is a scar that henceforth will endure to be reckoned with. Hurting people, only a few, is not accepted as a legitimate cost of doing business.

I find eleemosynary institutions most at fault on this issue — particularly with their employed staffs. There seems to be the assumption that since the cause being served is noble, what happens to the people who render the service is not a particular concern.

I once sat with the governing board of a large church as they discussed the many ramifications of their affairs. In listening to their discussions I was appalled at some of the attitudes they held and the cavalier actions they took regarding their employed staff. When it was appropriate for me to comment, I noted my observation on their attitudes and actions and I said: "I have spent my life in a business and had responsibility, directly or indirectly, for the careers of many people. If I had held attitudes like those you have revealed and had your record of hiring and firing people, at some point I would have been taken aside and told, 'Greenleaf, you may be good for something but we will not let you manage people. We can't afford this!' With the predominantly economic motive, most businesses I know about take greater care with their people than you do. This may have been part of what Emerson had in mind when he said (in *Works and Days*), 'The greatest meliorative force in the world is selfish huckstering trade!' "

It all reminds me of that powerful line with which Shakespeare opens his ninety-fourth sonnet:

"*They that have power to hurt and will do none.*" (not very little, but *none*) This is the sonnet that concludes with those caustic lines:

"For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

The intervening eleven lines will bear close scrutiny.

The firm aim of the servant (in my view) is that *no one* will be hurt.

Preparation of a servant, particularly for the exacting role of servant leader, should start not later than secondary school (before if possible) because, I believe, the servant needs to learn to stand against the culture on two critical issues: *power* and *competition*.

Power

I have no definitive view of power to offer: only some fragmentary thoughts. I grant that, in an imperfect world, some raw use of power

will always be with us. But as ours has become a huge, complex, institution-bound society, power seems more of an issue than it was in simpler times when it was easier to identify where coercive pressures came from. Also, within the past 200 years, the damage to power wielders has been clearly signaled — beginning with William Pitt's statement in the House of Commons in 1770, "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it," and then, in the late 19th century, Lord Acton's more quoted line, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It is interesting to note that Lord Acton, a Catholic layman, made this statement in heated opposition to the assumption of Papal infallibility in 1870. And what is the corruption that both Pitt and Acton might have had in mind? I believe it is *arrogance*, and all of the disabilities that follow in the wake of arrogance.

In *The Servant as Leader* I tell of John Woolman, the 18th century American Quaker who persuaded slave holding Quakers, one by one, to free their slaves. Half his persuasive argument was concern for the slave, the other half was concern for the damage done to the slaveholder and his family. John Woolman also used the word *corruption* in referring to the legacy of the slaveholder to his heirs.

Along the way, in a conversation I had with the chief executive of a large business concerning the incentives that make his job attractive, he listed as first, "The opportunity to wield power!" This came before monetary reward, prestige, service, and creative accomplishment — all of which, together, he said, would not compensate for carrying such a heavy burden.

A few years ago a friend called to tell me that he had just been made head of a philanthropic foundation — his first work of this kind. My immediate response, drawing on my own considerable experience with foundations, was, "The first thing that will happen to you is that you will no longer know who your friends are." This is a serious disability.

I will never forget my first venture as a foundation representative when I made a tour of a dozen universities on a new grant program. My wife met me at the airport when I returned and asked how it went. "I have no idea," was my reply. "I have never experienced anything like this before. In most of my work life I have had to do battle for my ideas every inch of the way and nothing I have tried to do has been a pushover. But here, in these conversations with high ranking officers of

prestigious universities, every word I uttered was received as a pearl of wisdom." *This was a corrupting experience.*

I am aware that some foundation representatives seem to rise above this corrupting influence; but I hold that the power of the almoner is near the absolute; and it is corrupting, as I am sure all power is. If it were not so clear in my own experience, I would not be so sure of it.

Somehow, the young potential servant should be helped to an awareness of power and its consequences on both the wielder and the object. In my essay *Trustees as Servants* I contend that "No one, *absolutely no one*, is to be entrusted with the operational use of power without the close oversight of fully functioning trustees." I would now generalize further and say that young potential servant leaders should be advised to shun any power-wielding role which is not shared with able colleagues who are equals. (See *The Institution as Servant* for an elaboration of this thesis). If a young potential servant leader can accept that the first protection against the corruption of power is *never* to undertake a power-wielding role alone; if this can be established when one is young, a lifestyle may be built on this principle that will be easy and natural. It is not easy and natural for one who is deeply entrenched as a lone wielder of power to contemplate carrying a major responsible role without a firm grip on power — in one's own hands, *alone*. One who is firmly established as a chief executive officer (a lone power wielder) will almost universally say, "It won't work, one person *must* hold the ultimate power." But if enough of today's able youngsters catch the vision of servant leadership and incorporate it into their life styles early, the day may come, when these people are in their prime years, that they will label, categorically, the current commonly accepted power striving of some successful people as *pathological* — because it makes for a sick society. Those who embrace the spirit of servant leadership early in their lives are likely to take a similar view of competition — and come to see it as an aberation, not a normal human trait. And when enough able people take *that* view, it will make a different world. But that will take some time.

Competition

It is difficult to know whether humankind's seemingly "normal" competitive urges are innate — the nature of the human animal — or whether they are acquired. It is difficult to know because the culture is so thoroughly competitive, and imposes its shaping imprint from in-

fancy onward, that one cannot sort out what *homo sapiens* would be like if raised in a non-competitive culture.

As I sit in the quiet of my study writing this piece on a beautiful January morning in 1980, I can feel the earth tremors of the speculative orgy that hangs over us as people scramble frantically to hedge themselves against the possible collapse of the monetary system by buying gold and other metals. What if the monetary system does collapse and I have a pot of hard gold in my safety deposit box? Where does this leave me? The answer is simple: I have won and somebody else has lost — whoever did not buy some gold when he could get it. And I have acquired power over that hapless person! I have won some competitive marbles.

Recently I was on a panel in a conference in a medical school that was discussing the subject of The Ethics of the Drug Industry. In preparation for the conference someone had made a video recording of drug ads on TV over a period of weeks; and we sat for twenty minutes watching these one after another.

It is bad enough to have to look at these zany ads when they appear once in a while as the price of watching commercial TV. But to sit through twenty minutes of nothing else — well, it was nauseating, an affront to taste, intellect, and integrity; and the conference erupted in indignation — "Something ought to be done about this!" After listening for a minute or two of this heated reaction I interjected with, "You shouldn't be so upset by these ads. As a nation we have made a clear social policy, backed by tough laws with criminal sanctions, that an industry like this will be *forced* to serve by requiring dog-eat-dog competition as a rule of doing business. When you decide to *force* service this way (and you really don't influence much but price) then you should not be surprised if you get a result like we have just witnessed."

The conference erupted again, "What would *you* do, repeal the antitrust laws?" And I answered, "I don't know what I would do. I have only one point: if you decree (and you have so decreed) that dog-eat-dog competition is to be the regulator, then do not be surprised if you get this kind of result. Anyway, what is so sacred about the antitrust laws? They were not brought down off the mountain chiseled in stone. They are crude man-made devices to deal with a clear social problem: how to elicit the best service we can get from a business. But there are several unhealthy by-products, one of which you have just seen." This

promoted considerable discussion, without conclusion. And there is not likely to be a better answer to the question: how can we elicit optimal service from people and institutions? as long as competition is uncritically accepted as *good* and is deeply imbedded in the culture. In the preparation of young potential servants to be servant leaders, the issue of competition must be critically examined and alternatives sought.

There is a curious bit of history of usage of the word *compete*. Modern usage puts it as "To strive or contend with another." While the Latin origin of the word is *competere* — to seek or strive together. The clear implications of the origin of this word is that competition is a cooperative rather than a contending relationship.

This reference may not help us to resolve our own personal dilemmas as we find ourselves in a struggle to beat out somebody else, in a society that supports that struggle with both moral and legal sanctions. (Recently I attended a conference on the subject of "The Judeo-Christian Ethic and the Modern Business Corporation." There were about twenty-five theologians of the major faiths present. In the papers and the discussions there was frequent reference to "unfair" competition, but I do not recall a single question by a theologian about competition per se.)

My position is: if we are to move toward a more caring, serving society than we now have, competition must be muted, if not eliminated. If theologians will not lead in this move (and I sense no initiative from that quarter), practicing servants will, and theologians will rationalize the result after the fact. The servant, in my view, will be non-competitive; but what can be the servant's affirmative position?

I believe that serving and competing are antithetical; the stronger the urge to serve the less the interest in competing. (Read Petr Kropotkin's classic *Mutual Aid* for perspective on this issue.) The servant is importantly concerned with the consequences of his or her actions: those being served, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants. *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? *And*, no one will knowingly be hurt by the action! — the servant is strong *without* competing. But, unfortunately, we have decreed that ours shall be a competitive society. How does a servant function in such a society?

Servant Leader: Strong or Weak

The power hungry person, who relishes competition and is good at it (meaning: usually wins) will probably judge the servant leader, as I have described that person, to be weak or naive or both. But let us look past the individual to the institution in which he or she serves: what (or who) makes that institution strong?

As I see it, the strongest, most productive institution over a long period of time is one in which, other things being equal, there is the largest amount of voluntary action in support of the goals of the institution. The people who staff the institution do the "right" things at the right times — things that optimize total effectiveness — because the goals are clear and comprehensive and they understand what ought to be done. They believe they are the right things to do, and they take the necessary actions without being instructed. No institution ever achieves this perfectly. But I submit that, other things being equal, the institution that achieves the most of this kind of voluntary action will be judged *strong*, stronger than comparable institutions that have less of these voluntary actions.

Earlier, in the discussion of mind sets, I gave the example of the more successful business in a highly competitive field that stands above its competitors in profitability, in the quality of the product it delivers, and in the absence of labor conflict that plagues all of the others. The principle difference, as I see it, is that this unusual company has more voluntary effort; its people do more, voluntarily, than other companies' people do for them. And it is not accidental. The man who built this business, dead for some years, put the poeple who worked for him *first*. As a consequence his employees delivered all that people can deliver — and the business came to lead its field. It is a "people" business. There are other companies in other fields that have taken this view and, when other things are equal, they are all strong when compared with competitors who do not take this view of people.

From my own experience with businesses, I would say that even when "people first" is not the policy of the top executives, "*strong*" subordinate executives may take the "people first" position and add strength to the business. In my old company when we occasionally conducted attitude surveys we noted what we called the "umbrella" effect. A strong subordinate manager would produce positive attitudes among his or her subordinates when the stance of higher level managers caused the prevailing attitudes in other parts of the company to be more

negative. I believe that able subordinate managers who are servants can build strength in the people they lead even when the policy that is projected on them from above works to destroy it. But such subordinate managers must be really strong in terms of toughness, conviction, and tenacity.

Further, when there is a sticky organizational problem in a business, an astute power wielding executive sometimes tries to find a person who is accepted as servant who will get into the situation and correct it — with persuasion. *And for purely practical reasons:* it comes out better than if somebody swings on it in a coercive or manipulative way!

Both the words "servant" and "persuasion" are "soft" words to some people. They do not connote the tough attitudes that are thought to be needed to hold this world together and get its work done.

Ten years ago when I chose to advocate, in writing, the servant leader concept, both words "serve" and "lead" were in a shadow. "Lead" seems to have recovered some stature, but "serve" is still questioned by many thoughtful people. I choose to stay with *serve*, *lead*, and *persuade* because I see, through the meaning they have for me, a path to restoring much of the dignity that has been lost through the depersonalization that industrialization has brought to us. And dignity adds strength both to individuals and to the institutions of which they are a part — strength to serve.

Prospects for the Servant Idea — Some Speculations

In much of what I have written on the servant theme, including most of this essay, I have dealt with issues of leadership and institution building. After ten years of circulation of these writings and considerable interaction about them with people who have their hands on the levers of power and influence, I am not persuaded that much movement toward our society becoming more caring is likely to be initiated by those who are now established as leaders. Mind sets like the four discussed earlier are much too prevalent and entrenched, and we seem not to have the resources to generate, or the openness to receive, liberating visions. Whatever older people can do to make ours a more serving, caring society should be encouraged; but I do not expect much from my contemporaries.

We (some of us) do know how to prepare and inspire young people to press the limits of the reasonable and possible, with some of them becoming skilled builders of more serving institutions. The overarching

vision that will inspire and energize mentors of the young is my prime concern. These mentors are strong able people who believe that well prepared young people, in whom servant leadership is an integral part of their life styles, are likely to bring to reality some of what we oldsters can only dream about.

My hope for the future, and I do have hope, is that some (perhaps many) young people whose life styles may yet be shaped by conscious choices may be helped to more serving roles than most of their elders occupy today. What I have written is not likely to give this help directly to young people. But it may be useful to those who have the gifts and the will and the courage to be mentors of the young. And I believe that the psychic rewards to these mentors can be very great. What could bring more satisfaction to oldsters than helping some of the young to become servant leaders?

In *Teacher as Servant* I described in detail how a university teacher could, without the support of university or colleagues, encourage, in a decisive way, the growth as servant of a large number of students. I hazarded a guess that, if there were a way to alert them to the opportunity, perhaps as many as one in a thousand of the 500,000 or so university and college faculty in the U.S. might take the initiative to give this precious help to students. And I reasoned that the five hundred, if they worked at it over a career, could favor the time of the next generation becoming a golden age of leadership in our country. It can be done without adding to college and university budgets. It would require no changes in the curriculum, no administrative or faculty actions, no trustee initiatives. All that is needed is a handful, really, of determined and perceptive faculty members who, deep down inside, are true servants and who, without extra compensation and recognition — perhaps in the face of some opposition — will *lead* in this most fundamental way. They will go out ahead to show, by their example, how one may be a servant in what appears to be a cold, low-caring, highly competitive, violence-prone society. These servant teachers may be a saving remnant, in the Biblical sense. And saving remnants are usually not empowered, approved, or well financed.

I would now amend the language of this assertion in just one particular way. In place of "alert them (the one in a thousand teachers) to the opportunity" I would substitute "inspire them with a vision of the opportunity."

One who might respond to this suggestion is the president, especially

in a small college; but it also might be a large university. The president might personally offer to lead a non-credit seminar for elected student leaders. The agenda of the seminar might be discussions with invited resource people and sharing between the president and these student leaders on matters of mutual concern in their current leadership roles. In my conversations with student leaders I have found them concerned with some of the same issues that are on the minds of presidents — matters of the spirit. Presidents might find in these seminars a helpful close contact with students, and students would have the opportunity to learn about leadership from each other and from the president — experientially. The president may learn something about leadership, too — a new perspective on that job.

The prospect for the servant idea rests almost entirely, I believe, on some among us *investing the energy and taking the risks to inspire with a vision*. In our large and complex society, a single compelling prophetic voice may not, as Grundtvig did in 19th century Denmark, move those few who will educate and inspire enough young people to rebuild the entire culture. In our times the orchestration of many prophetic visionaries may be required. But I believe the ultimate effect will be the same: *teachers* (individuals, not institutions) will be inspired to raise the society-building consciousness of the young. And *teachers* may be anybody who can reach young people who have the potential to be servants and prepare them to be servant leaders. These teachers may be members of school faculties, presidents of colleges and universities, those working with young people in churches. Some may be parents, others may be either professionals or volunteers working with youth groups. But whoever and wherever they are, these teachers will catch the vision and *do what they know how to do*. First, they will reinforce or build hope. Young people will be helped to accept the world, and to believe that they can learn to live productively in it *as it is* — striving, violent, unjust, as well as beautiful, caring, and supportive. They will be helped to believe that they can cope, and that, if they work at it over a lifetime, they may leave a little corner of the world a bit better than they found it. Then these teachers will nourish the embryo spark of servant in as many as possible and help prepare those who are able — *to lead!*

Thus I do not see the prospect for the servant idea being carried by a great mass movement — not soon.

I have premised this discussion on building hope in the young and preparing some of them to serve and lead. As an oldster, *I* have hope that is supported by the belief that some seminaries and foundations will have (or find) trustees of the stature who will help them (seminaries and foundations) to be self-regenerating institutions. These then will become sources of prophetic visions for, and supports of organizational strength in, schools and churches which will minister to individuals and to the vast structure of operating institutions that make up our complex society. Central to this ministry will be the encouragement of teachers of servants — some of whom will become leaders who make their careers as regenerating influences within institutions of all sorts, including seminaries and foundations — thus closing the loop. But the prime movers in this process, as I see it, are trustees of foundations and seminaries. It is for these exceptionally able and dedicated trustees to initiate and to sustain the process. I believe that a few will. This is the basis of my hope.

Beyond my hope I have a speculative prospect to share: that some of these servant leaders will bring together communities of seekers who find — *and continue to seek*, thus adding a new building force that works toward an evolving caring society.

I envision that these communities (of seeking servants who find — and continue to seek) will bring a new kind of institution that is radically different from anything we now have. It may be a business, a church, a school, a unit of government. Or it may be an institution that embraces aspects of several of these. But it will be *new*, and its emergence will be a hopeful augury for everybody, especially for young people.

In this way a prophetic vision for the twenty-first century may be delivered to us — not in words, but by a few humble servants saying simply, "Here it is, come and see."

The reader is invited to speculate on what this new institution might be like and what its presence might mean to the quality of our common life. These speculations might help this new institution to come, by creating receptivity for a new vision.

Note on Liberating Visions

A final note on receiving, communicating, and responding to *liberating visions*. This is an illusive term. What could it mean? Let me give an example out of my experience.

When I was working closely with several colleges and universities in the late nineteen sixties I became aware that one of the student preoccupations of that period was reading the novels of Hermann Hesse. College book stores had stacks and stacks of them — and some still do. Because I was deeply concerned with what was going on in students' minds at that time I made a project of reading all that Hesse wrote, in the order that he wrote those stories. Along with them I read a biography that told me what was going on in Hesse's life as he wrote each book.

Hesse, in the early part of his life, was a tormented man, in and out of mental illness that is reflected in what he was writing at the time. His book *Journey to the East* marks the turning point toward the serenity that he achieved in his later year when he wrote his greatest novel, *Magister Ludi*, that earned a Nobel Prize for literature. I found *Journey to the East* a hopeful book because it is the story of Leo, the central figure who accompanies a band of men on their mythical journey (probably Hesse's own journey) as the *servant* who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well with the journey until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo whom he had first known as *servant* was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble *leader*. The story of Leo gave me the idea of *Servant as Leader*.

Later a Catholic Sister came to talk about what I had written in *Servant as Leader*. In the course of the discussion she asked me where I found the earliest reference to the idea of servant. I replied, in the Bible, of course, beginning early in the Old Testament. Her rather sharp question was, "Then why do you attribute it to reading Hesse?" I responded, "Because that was where I got the idea to write on the Servant as Leader theme. If I had not read the story of Leo, I might never have written anything on this subject. There was something in Hesse's story that moved me in a way that I had not been moved before."

In the terms that I have been discussing the subject of liberating visions, I was prepared to receive one by my deep immersion in the student turmoil of the sixties and by reading Hesse as part of my search

for understanding of what was going on in student minds. The liberating vision that took me into one of the most interesting and productive chapters of my life was delivered by Hermann Hesse.

This essay, *SERVANT, Retrospect and Prospect*, has had much to do with receiving, communicating, and responding to *liberating visions*. What I learned from the experience noted above is that liberating visions can come from anywhere at any time and that they may or may not bear any particular theological label. Important to me are:

— Immerse oneself in the experiences this world offers.
— Be accepting of the people involved in these experiences and seek to understand what moves them.
— Acknowledge — and stand in awe before — the ineffable mystery that shrouds the source of all understanding of human motives that leads to visions.
— *Be open to receive, and act upon, what inspiration offers.*

Along the way I had a dream that may have had something to do with the course of my experience these last ten years.

It is a beautiful summer day and I am in a lovely, extensive woods in which there is a labyrinth of paths. I am riding a bicycle through these paths, holding in my hand a map of them to guide my journey. It is a buoyant, joyful experience and there is a delightful certainty about it. Suddenly a gust of wind blows the map out of my hand. I stop and look back to see it flutter to the ground, to be picked up by an old man who stands there holding it for me. I walk back to retrieve my map; but when I arrive at the old man, he hands me — not my map, but a small round tray of earth in which fresh grass seedlings are growing.

Where there is no vision, the people perish.
Proverbs XXXIX :18 (King James Version)

What is now proved was once only imagin'd.
William Blake (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell)

Postscript

As I was writing this an invitation came to visit a small church-related college where they wanted to talk about a new goal for the college: to make preparation for servant leadership a central concern in the work of the college. I visited with faculty, as a whole and in groups, and with student leaders. It was an encouraging experience, to find that a college wants to consider such a move. My parting advice was not to try to "legislate" such a change but to give leadership and encourage wide discussion, and let new directions come as individuals find ways to work toward such a goal with the hope that, ultimately, a consensus will emerge. This is what servant leadership is about: helping consensus, voluntary and durable consensus, to evolve.

This was the first response of this kind after ten years of writing and talking about the servant leadership idea. But the prospect that just one small college may take this tentative step, in explicit servant terms, raises my hope for the future.